



Pink Ladyslipper /Mark Graesser

Your Voice

MUN Pensioners' Association (MUNPA) • Vol. 20, No. 3, June 2022

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Early Days with the East Coast Trail

Adrian Tanner

Photos by Mark Graesser

In 1992, following my discovery of the marvelous long distance hiking trail system in New Zealand, I became involved with a group of Newfoundland hikers who formed the East Coast Trail Association. This organization aimed to open up the traditional, mainly coastal, footpaths that once connected the communities along the East coast of the Avalon peninsula. While Peter Gard's original plan was for the trail to go from Cape St Francis to Cape Race, some of our members, living in Portugal Cove, persuaded us to extend the planned trail. They were already hiking some of the coastal paths on the Conception Bay side, down as far as Topsail Beach. We also responded to requests that we extend the trail past Cape Race as far as Trepassey, but these were just plans, and they are taking many years to eventually become reality.

Many of the hikers in our group were "Come from Aways," like myself, but from the start several Newfoundlanders, such as Randy Murphy and Ed Delaney, joined and took key roles in the organization. Then, in 1997, faced with the prospect of losing our trail, the Association won a \$1.2 million ACOA contract. This funding was to develop a publicly accessible route from Cappehayden to Bay Bulls (later extended to St John's). This route was to attain world class tourist hiking standards. This would be the first of many projects to eventually develop the full length of the trail. While the Association could hire staff for this project, it was run by a volunteer Board of Directors who directly managed all the planning and construction. Of necessity a



Peter Gard mapping a new section of the trail.

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From the Editor

Greetings!

This is my last MUNPA newsletter as Editor. I have enjoyed my years with the Board and I am particularly thankful for the opportunity of being Editor of Your Voice. It has given me great joy to get to know some of the many people at Memorial from a different perspective. Some of you I had already known through work, but others I had never met, yet I feel I know all of you through your stories... Such amazing stories!

I'm intrigued by the number of Memorial employees who found their way to our Province and the circumstances that led them here. Many made it their home. In a previous issue, Peg Cox shared her childhood story and noted the foreshadowing she experienced before she actually came to live in Newfoundland and Labrador. Many of our writers took a leap of faith and jumped at opportunities, often without knowing what really lay ahead. Our life journeys are all unique and it is a privilege to read what you share. Some are touching, others are funny, and some leave us with questions like the teaser that Mark Graesser throws out at the end of his story in a previous issue. Then there are the poignant stories, like the one by Sharon Buehler about her first few jobs and the lessons they taught her. If you haven't read any of these, and many others, I invite you to peruse the issues on our website.

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President's Message

As I write this, the MUNPA AGM is only days away, and with it the end of another year of working on your behalf. During that year, and despite Covid, the MUNPA Board was able to deliver a diverse array of programming, albeit mostly virtual (including a virtual presentation on 'zipper merges and roundabouts!'). We continue to ensure pensioners' voices are heard on both the Benefits and the Pensions Committees of the University. Toward the end of the year, we offered more in person activities (e.g. Painting with Botanicals), and many of our interest groups also started meeting in person. Hopefully, this trend will continue next year as pandemic restrictions relax. What will not change, however, is our use of virtual programming to engage those members unable to participate in our activities in person.

It has been my honour and pleasure to act as your President during this time, but the credit for our successes belongs very much to our Board of Directors, our Office Manager, Jackie Collins, and those members of our working committees who are not on the Board itself – thank you all! I also very much appreciate the continuing support from Memorial University, including provision of office and meeting space at the Signal Hill Campus.

Our By-Laws place term limits on Board members, so there is inevitably some turnover at every AGM. This year, we are losing Bernadette Power, Editor of Your Voice. Her skill and dedication have helped make our newsletter a 'must read' and she will be a hard act to follow! In addition, Steve Wolinetz will be replaced as Past-President by yours truly once the Nominations Report is ratified at the AGM. Steve has given yeoman service in the past year, in particular by his determined efforts to recruit new Board members. Thanks to him a strong Board will be in place for 2022-23, and we have several good prospects for future years.

Keep an eye open for news of our Fall program. Our Program Committee dedicates time over the summer so we can hit the ground running in September. I can't emphasize enough the importance of your input via munpa@mun.ca at all times. Please keep in touch!

Grant Gardner



On Thursday, May 26, approximately 25 West Coast MUNPA members enjoyed a walk and lunch at the Humber Valley Resort, just outside Corner Brook. The Eagles' Perch Restaurant, the highest point at the Resort, boasts spectacular views of the Humber Valley.

This June 2022 issue includes wonderful stories of birds, guns, travel (not directly linked), and the early days of the East Coast Trail which highlights the dedication by many Memorial employees to this beautiful trail. Memorial employees and retirees continue to support the Trail and other community initiatives which bridges Memorial and community!

Whatever your story, I hope you'll consider sharing, if you haven't already. In the meantime, I wish you a safe and happy summer season. Please support the new Editor of Your Voice by continuing to submit your wonderful stories for the enjoyment of your fellow Memorial retirees.

Bernadette



Clear Cove, near Port Kirwan, East Coast Trail

/Mark Graesser

Birds

Joan Scott

It's that time of year when I catch sight of a bird carrying twigs or dead grass in its beak. Or one flying horizontally and urgently carrying a worm. Or while sitting with a coffee I see, a starling waiting on a wire, with something dangling from its beak, sharing nest duties with its partner. They have built a nest in the curve of a giant letter 'S', safely off the ground, but where more food can quickly be found in the grass verge or beyond. One waits on a wire to take the babes a meal, until the other emerges carrying away the tiny white sac of waste.

On May 12 I saw a swallow flying above me, while I was driving. The first of the year for me. For a few seconds, the identification was dubious until a second one arrived for a mid-air dance. One small bird is like any other, but when I saw the two of them together I knew the 2022 swallows had arrived.

A quick check on line showed that the osprey, our major star bird, had also returned. For me, all that is left of the regulars to welcome back are the terns.

Yes I call myself a bird-watcher these days. It was not always so.

I grew up as an urban youngster, in Ipswich, a town in an agricultural part of the UK, where the common birds, were robins, thrushes pulling worms out of lawns, gymnastic blue tits (chickadees to Canadians), and swans sailing on park ponds, in addition to gulls and sparrows and starlings. Rarer were the herons, but we knew of a pond outside the fence of Holywells Park, and impossible for us to reach, where a heron could sometimes be spotted through the greenery.

When I was a teen the school arranged a field trip to a tidal wet land just outside Bourne Park, on the edge of town. There I saw my first swan's nest. At that time, vandalism of swan's nests was routine. Perhaps our trip was part of a campaign to stop it.

A Mr. Bird was the leader, unlikely as that sounds. Looking back I can say that **he** was certainly a bird watcher. Percy Edwards, a local

celebrity, also gave talks with imitations of birdsong.

So, how did I become a self-identified bird-watcher? No doubt the early experiences among people with an interest in them, such as my high school biology teacher, conditioned me in that direction. She had her center of activities in a dual purpose classroom and laboratory, with a Prep. Room, on the top floor of a two storey part of the school. A door led out onto the roof where she had a rabbit hutch.

Just a few words about the Northgate Grammar where I went to school from about 1945 till 1951, in a building completed only in September 1931, (see *A School Remembered. An Account of the origins and development of the Northgate Grammar School for Girls* by E. J. Atkinson). The state school as a community was older, mirroring the UK history of education of girls and women. It's ninety year history went back to the mid nineteenth century and, it had only our head mistresses, the first of whom was a classical scholar from Girton College. So I, the future bird watcher, in 1945 came to this building that opened in 1931. Looking back I feel I was very lucky to be attending school in such a modern building, with so much fresh air and light. At the time I was impressed when hot water came out of the tap labelled "hot," something which had not happened at my two earlier schools. With regard to academics, I was thrilled when I was old enough to begin biology proper with Miss Short in the lab with the door onto the roof.

As if in full knowledge of the purpose of the place, a pied wagtail, a beautiful black and white bird, often seen strutting on the school lawns, built its nest there, using materials from the rabbit hutch. Then, as if to further enrich the lives of us students, a cuckoo chose the nest of the pied wagtail in which to lay its egg. The growing cuckoo became the focus of many super quiet mini field trips by long lines of fascinated students, of whom I was one. I don't think that I was yet a bird watcher but I was certainly accumulating relevant experiences.

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A Gun in the Bedroom

Roberta Buchanan

The recent massacre of elementary schoolchildren and teachers in Uvalde, Texas, and the discussion over gun culture in the United States, reminded me of the only person I knew who had a gun.

I was on sabbatical in Los Angeles, doing research at the Huntington Library in Pasadena. I didn't have a car and couldn't drive, and it occurred to me that this was the perfect place to take driving lessons. It was all flat, unlike the steep hills of St John's, and on a grid system with numbered streets and avenues. This is how I got to know Pat, my driving instructor. My knowledge of L.A. was limited to where I could walk or get a bus. This was not good enough for Pat. Had I been to the Mexican market, the real L.A.? Had I been riding on the Hollywood Hills? I liked Pat immediately and we soon became friends. She enjoyed showing me round, and invited me to her home. There she lived with her two dogs, a large but old German shepherd and a young yappy little white dog. "Mi casa, su casa," she said.

She had an unusual living arrangement, in a large space intended for commercial, not domestic use. You entered into this compound through large gates operated electronically, so Pat never had to get out of her car until she was safely inside. Very high walls topped with barbed wire made it virtually impossible to climb in: a fortress. The entrance to her home consisted of a roll-top garage type door, wide enough for crates or machinery. Next door was a ceramics factory which produced bases for lamps – the kind you find in Canadian Tire or Walmart.

Pat had cleverly divided up what was really a large shed to different living areas: bedroom, sitting area, dining area and kitchen. The bedroom right at the back had a wall of very thick opaque squares of glass, with her front door. It was only the third time that I visited Pat that she showed me the gun in her bedside drawer. I was horrified. I certainly would not have come if I had known it was there. I told Pat that I disapproved of guns and any kind of violence. For the first time she opened her front door and showed me what was outside.

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Birds, continued

A true bird watcher must take the initiative to learn and perhaps teach others. As an individual, it was not until around 1970 that I felt I could lay claim to that title. I think I was encouraged by my connection with the Newfoundland Natural History Society in St John's, of which I somehow became President. In those years we were meeting monthly in the cinema on the Base, at Pepperrell, before it was renamed Pleasantville. Movies or slides were part of the evening's activities as were the goodies offered after, often by the Barton's, Evelyn and Don (he was a prof in the chemistry dept). Between those meetings the Executive met to plan future events including field trips. The pressure I felt at that time to develop some initiative to get our members to interesting places, got me into the habit of becoming conscious of events here, in nature. I had completed an undergraduate Biology

Degree in 1968 and the influence of profs from that time contributed. By then I had visited several major sites and had a level of authority on the subject.

Then I was asked to plan a one-day bus tour to Cape St Mary's for members of The Ontario Federation of Naturalists, largely bird watchers, who were touring the province. Later I did the same for a ten-day trip. Actually, they wanted John Maunder, but he was unavailable and the invitation was passed down to me and I accepted it. After surviving my 10 day exposure to the range of very human behavior of these bird watchers, and receiving some nice letters afterward from participants, I was ready to self-identify as one myself. I hope to describe some highlights of my experiences as a bird watcher in a later memoir.

Reflections on Changing Travel

Marilyn Porter

We all know how COVID messed up and complicated how we travel nowadays. And, more or less, post-covid is even worse. The chaos at Toronto airport gets astonishing coverage, and the story is the same in airports and stations around the world. But there are more significant ways in which the world we travel today is different from the world we travelled as our younger selves.

This musing is prompted by a recent family holiday in Jordan, and in particular our obligatory trip to Petra, "the rose red city, half as old as time," as the romantic 19th century traveler John Burgon described it.

I first visited Petra in 1962 with my mother and my younger sister. We were in Jordan because my mother had been fascinated by the Holy Land sites and because I was studying the Crusades as part of my history degree. Jordan had annexed the whole West Bank territory after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and retained control until the 1967 Six Day war. The whole war-torn history of the region is, of course, immensely complex and controversial but suffice to say here that Petra was under Jordanian control for both my 1962 and 2022 visits – a continuity rare in the region.

In 1962 there were no tourist hotels in the town of Wadi Musa, a few miles from the entrance to Petra. There are now numerous hotels, B and Bs, shops, modern pharmacies and every

modern convenience, and loads of tourists from around the world.

Back on that first trip I remember drinking freshly brewed Turkish coffee from a roadside stall on the rocky road to the entrance to Petra in the early dawn hours. We must have driven down from Jerusalem overnight specifically to visit Petra. I also remember the bruisingly stony and dramatic passageway into the famous view of the Treasury (now paved, but still rough), but not the array of souvenir shops and toilets that now adorn that space. I also remember that my sister had picked a fine Arabian horse to ride and managed to persuade the young boy leading her to let her off to ride on her own – and my mother's horror as she kicked up her hooves and set off at a canter into the barren hills.

I was born in 1942 in the UK. There was plenty of travel during the war as men were shipped and flew to their postings and, though rarely, home on leave. Far away postings such as my father's to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) usually involved three years without home leave. At home, lucky men travelled home on leave, and wives travelled to military and naval bases to visit their husbands when leaves were too short or homes too distant to allow men to travel home. Overseas holidays were out of the question. But people could travel by train to seaside

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A Gun in the Bedroom, continued

Opposite was a liquor store on the corner which was often robbed at gun point, and defended by the owner who also had a gun. This was a predominantly black area of the city, she said. Then she showed me the bullet holes in the thick glass wall. This was why she had the gun by her bed, in case she was attacked. Her friend's ex husband had been attacked in his home and not only robbed but murdered.

This made me think. If I lived in a place where home invasion, robbery and violence existed, and my neighbours had been attacked, would I too think of getting a gun? If I lived in a climate

of fear? I hope not, but I've never had to make the decision. I refused a salesman who tried to sell me an electronic alarm system. My 90-year-old neighbour opposite me on Monkstown Road did get one after she had an intruder one night in her house.

And what happened to my friend Pat in L.A? Did she ever have an occasion to use her gun? Did she die by violence? No. A few months after I left, she died of cancer.

resorts, which became very popular, and much advertised by the rail companies.

In the immediate post war period strict border controls remained between European countries and travelling much beyond one's home country was exceedingly difficult. Apart from other difficulties, currency restrictions meant that extended stays were impossible. I remember my parents taking virtually all the food we would need for two weeks skiing in Switzerland in the early 1950s, and the car being packed with luxuries like Swiss cheese and cured meat for the return.

Even in the early 1960s (my student days) international travel required lengthy travails to secure the necessary visas or travel permits, to say nothing of the vaccinations and other health requirements. The "First Aid Kits" we carried would put a small hospital to shame.

Now there are many more people, from much more diverse origins, travelling, even during Covid times. It is easier and cheaper to get to faraway places and many more outfits eager to organise people to travel – from the mass tourism companies to the donkey rentals of Petra. Air BnB and Trip Advisor have overtaken the battered copies of Lonely Planet and Rough Guides and the still surprisingly useful Guide Books of yesteryear, such as John Murray's *Handbooks for Travellers*. For our long ago trip to Petra my mother carried TE Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and I carried his Master's thesis on the Crusader castles.

Cheap, or cheapish, air travel has transformed long distance travel and the "Gap Year" has become an institution for many youngsters en route to university. Older travelers who would never have ventured out of the country before are now lured by a host of colourful brochures and can depend on all the western conveniences, including internet, when they get there.

Where on earlier trips I have clambered over fallen walls and relied on diagrams in the guidebook to show me round, now there are information boards and zealous, and sometimes compulsory, guided tours. The sites themselves have also changed markedly. They are now gated, with hefty entrance fees. Uniformed and armed guards are much in evidence. On my last visit to Jordan I was unable to visit the Kerak de Chevaliers because of a recent terrorist incident

in which, unhappily, two Newfoundland women were killed. But Jordan in general, and Petra, in particular, is mostly relaxed and low key, happy to leave its visitors pretty much free to roam the historic sites on their own.

I find myself ambivalent about the increase in mass tourism. I welcome that so many people who were previously unable to visit sites like Petra can now do so, but fear that the sheer "massness" of the experience has diluted it beyond the point that it is valuable. Convoys of tour buses and the sight of thousands of cruise ship passengers descending on tiny places with few resources and being herded in and out of sundry "shopping experiences" does not convince me that the participants are gaining much in terms of social, environmental or historical experiences.

None of that touches on what I see as the key difference between travel in the early 1960s and today. When we travelled in the 1960s we essentially disappeared off the face of the earth. Our parents knew roughly which country we were in but had nothing more than an intended itinerary and the occasional telegram to inform them that all was well (or not well). Unless you were staying in very high-end hotels or moved in diplomatic circles there was no way you could be reached, especially if you were in mountainous or remote deserts – or were at sea. Even sailing in the Irish Sea – a mere 40 miles from land, you were unreachable in the days before effective and cheap ship to shore radio arrived. After one notably rough crossing I remember my brother and I making the obligatory call home from a particularly stinking Irish phone box, both of us suffering from landsickness compounded by the phone box stench so we took turns providing our parents with the minimum information, before bolting outside for fresh air.

When my grandfather died, my mother was camel trekking in northern Kenya. The funeral was long over before she heard the news. George Mallory and his team were attempting Everest and missed the declaration of WW1 – including their call-up papers. I mention this only because in those days no-one assumed that you could make instant contact with everyone all the time however dire the circumstances.

It is a remarkable change for both good and bad.

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Volunteer maintenance workers, Sugarloaf Path.

system of sub-committees emerged, which proliferated over time, each headed by a board member, and each charged with such specialized on-going tasks as route planning, construction standards, consulting with private land owners and town councils, organizing trail custodians, maintenance, fund-raising, publicity, and so on.

Most of the volunteers were townies, but for our new venture we needed the good will and support of the small coastal communities south of St John's. We engaged with all the town councils, and some of them were very supportive. We got some Southern Shore residents like Chris Ryan of Bay Bulls and Bill Luby of Witless Bay to join our Board of Directors. In those days the Board was small and held weekly meetings, while each board member did a lot of work in between meetings.

A lion's share was done by the President, Randy Murphy. Another early board member was Wayne Spracklin, a lawyer who did pro-bono work for the Association. Other early members included Robbie Hicks, whose day job was a lab demonstrator at MUN.

While most of the Board's attention between 1997 and 2001 was necessarily focused on the section funded by ACOA, volunteers also continued restoring other coastal trails to the north and west of St John's. During the summer we also organized guided hikes that were open to anyone. One of our active members was Elke Dettmer, who runs a hiker's B&B and Artist's retreat at Pouch Cove. Even in those early years she would travel annually to outdoor shows in her native Germany, to promote hiking in

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Reflections on Changing Travel, continued

I lay in my tent in Wadi Rum and checked the progress of the war in Ukraine. My granddaughters face-timed their friends daily. My daughter checked up on crises at work and the welfare of the other granddaughter, who was travelling in Guatemala, and she posted photos to her Facebook page. Mark was reading his book online, and judging by the music

drifting across the encampment, the camp staff were watching movies on their cell phones.

It is a connected world, and it has its conveniences and safety features but it is a very different experience of "place" than the world of the 1960s.



Ed Delaney, Operations Manager

Newfoundland. She also began to offer her guests transportation to and from the trailheads.

We set up the project office in Bay Bulls, hired an office manager and seasonal trail building teams. We persuaded Ed Delaney to give up his summer job in order to work for us full time to oversee the construction teams. In the winter planning for the upcoming season, Ed's expertise was crucial to the project. The Association remained a volunteer-led organization. Personally, apart from keeping minutes of board meetings, I was especially involved with the land and legal committee, so that, along with Ed, I dealt with countless private landowners, as well as with town councils. Randy Murphy brought to the Association a wealth of experience in project management. Randy's day job was with Newfoundland Hydro, and his knowledge and experience of the finer details of planning and executing a complex project were key to the eventual success of the funded project.

This was not the first trail project that had been funded in the wake of the Cod Moratorium, but many of them had generally been treated as one-time make-work projects, without plans for the upkeep of the trails. Some were falling into disrepair after a few years.

From the start the East Coast Trail planned for trail maintenance, using a system of path custodians. Twice each year a custodian walks

their particular section of the trail, and reports back on any maintenance work that is needed, such as tree blowdowns, wet sections of trail, and especially, anything that could be hazardous to hikers. The planning of future maintenance work is prioritized on the basis of these custodian reports. Any skilled maintenance work is undertaken by paid crews, while volunteer teams carry out the lighter tasks.

Over time we learned how to deal with a host of potential problems. We also became increasingly aware that, as trail builders and managers, we now had a liability for the safety of hikers, and as a government-sponsored tourist attraction, we are required to carry liability insurance.

While in the early years we consulted with other North American trail groups about best practices for the building and maintenance of hiking trails, including with people from the Appalachian Trail in the eastern US, and the Bruce Trail in southwestern Ontario, we found that the environment of the Avalon Peninsula presents its own unique challenges. For example, while I have lived in many parts of the world, this is the only place I know of where you can find permanent swamps on sloping land! Water is a perennial issue for the trail. If there is a wet patch, hikers tend to walk around it, which enlarges the patch, such that the larger the wet patch, the more damage hikers eventually do to the surrounding environment. Thus we learned how to install water bars at an angle across the trail, to direct rain water off the tread-way. We learned such things as how



East Coast Trail "hardening" techniques.

to add signage to bare rock. Where parts of the trail cross expanses of bare rock, we found how to bolt directional signs directly onto the rock.

Our philosophy was and remains that the trail is there to put hikers in direct touch with nature, and as such we try to do so with the minimum of human-built structures to detract

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La Manch bridge official opening event.

from the natural environment. To that end, as a wilderness trail, we generally try to avoid such structures as benches or garbage containers, particularly as they require maintenance. We only install structures such as boardwalks, stairs and bridges where they are needed for the safety of hikers. Our philosophy is that the structures are not so much for the convenience of the hikers, as they are to protect the environment from the impact of the hikers. We also install minimal signage, just sufficient that hikers keep to the trail.

One major difficulty we faced was at the abandoned community of La Manche. This had been a small fishing community, composed of members of two extended families, one of each side of the gut. The two sides were connected by a rickety suspension bridge hanging close to the water. On the north side of the bridge there is an almost vertical high cliff. This original bridge could only be accessed on that side via a long section of stage work built over the water alongside and attached to the shore. In 1966 a storm washed out all the docks and stages, after which the community was abandoned.

In 1998 the East Coast Trail needed a way to get from one side of the gut to the other. There was a large pond upstream, so that there was no practical way to go further inland, except by

a very extensive re-routing through a provincial park. Luckily, Bill Collins, an engineer and one of our volunteer members, came up with (at no cost to us) the design for a suspension bridge that met modern standards for a public walkway. Moreover, Bill helped us find a contractor who would build his design at a cost we could fit within our budget for that year.

We had other help from the private sector. One of our members was working on the Hibernia project, and he helped us re-open the Spout. This is a famous geyser located between Petty Harbour and Bay Bulls. Wave action inside a sea cave below periodically creates air pressure, which escapes through cracks in the rocks all the way to the top of the cliff above the cave. At the same time a small stream empties itself into these cracks. Every few minutes the pressure builds up in the sea cave and exits through these cracks, blowing this stream of water skywards.

When we started renovating that section of the trail, we found that a large rock was blocking the top of the spout. The spray only went out to one side and was not at all as spectacular as it once had been. So how could we move the huge rock that was blocking the Spout? Thanks to the people with Hibernia, a boat carried a large block and tackle and supporting tripod to the foot of the cliff, which was then hauled up by hand, the hundred or more feet, to the top of the cliff. They managed to use this equipment to lift and move the gigantic rock, so that today the Spout again sends its spray skyward every few minutes.



The newly revived Spout, 1996.